

RBFF STATE INNOVATIVE R3 PROGRAM GRANTS MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES ES MI PARQUE

PARTNERS

- Recreational Boating & Fishing Foundation
- Governor's Commission on Hispanic Affairs
- Community Master Naturalist Volunteers

OVERVIEW

To learn more about Hispanic visitors to state parks, the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (MD DNR) commissioned a study in 2015 in Sandy Point State Park. The study found that this park receives approximately 1 million visitors per year, and with 60% of these visitors only speaking Spanish, with little or no command of the English language. Therefore, there are tens of thousands of visitors each year that cannot read the information on fishing, boating safety, and park use rules posted there.

Lack of understanding of fishing, water safety and park use regulations can lead to violations, fines, water-related fatalities, and lack of stewardship. In 2016, a pilot project was started based on RBFF's "Vamos A Pescar" outreach. This pilot consisted of three outreach events in state parks, focusing on fishing rules and regulations. The project was expanded in 2017 and re-named "Es Mi Parque" to better reflect the expanded vision to provide better customer service to Spanish-speaking visitors in the state parks.

METHODOLOGY

Es Mi Parque conducted a "Fun Day" in six parks favored by Hispanic visitors during the summer 2017 season where free fishing, water safety and stewardship activities were offered to kids.

"Splash the Water Dog" gave presentations about water safety and proper life vest usage. Seine net fishing programs provided an introductory experience touching and identifying fish and other aquatic creatures. "Trash" games sowed the seeds of stewardship in children as well.

Information about fishing rules, techniques, boating safety, and park regulations were presented in Spanish. Native Spanish speakers were available to answer questions and provide further information. These critical staff came from various units within the Department (Fisheries, Parks, Natural Resources Police, Education), the Governor's Commission on Hispanic affairs and Maryland Master Naturalists.

BENEFITS

- Cross unit working relationships among Department staff that work with the Hispanic community were improved and strengthened.
- Increased commitment to improve customer service to the community.
- Strengthened partnership with Governor's Commission on Hispanic Affairs.
- Volunteers/workers received positive reinforcement when kids demonstrated learnings and adults sought them out to ask questions.
- Department leadership acknowledged the need for more Spanish speaking staff so they can provide appropriate customer service to this community.



SUPPORT

“Working these Es Mi Parque outreach events and connecting with our visitors has been the highlight of my 2 – year tenure at the Department of Natural Resources.” -Kevin Chesley



RESULTS

- Hundreds of children were introduced to fishing and taught the basic elements of environmental stewardship and water safety.
- Hundreds of Spanish-speaking adults were informed about fishing license requirements and park safety and use rules.
- Reinforcement of the idea that parks are open and welcome to all visitors.
- The following department changes were also a result:
 - Fishing regulations are now available in Spanish.
 - The Boating Safety Course has been translated into Spanish and is now being offered in Spanish on a trial basis.
 - The Natural Resources Police (Outreach Division) is translating and publishing several water safety outreach materials into Spanish.
 - The DNR State Fair Exhibit now includes information in Spanish on water safety and fishing.
 - In 2017, the Department hired the first-ever “Diversity Coordinator”.
 - As the result of 2 successful years of outreach, the Department hired the first-ever Multicultural Outreach Coordinator with a Spanish fluency requirement in 2018.



LESSONS LEARNED/FUTURE PLANS

Lessons Learned:

- Due to language and social barriers, most Hispanic visitors were not aware of fishing license requirements, regulation or boating safety requirements.
- Many DNR staff members (including upper management) did not realize the number of Hispanic visitors to the parks nor the possible affects of cultural and language barriers.
- Many Hispanic visitors are illiterate in Spanish (this has been estimated at approximately 20% in Maryland), so effective communication must go beyond signage.
- Partnership with recognized governmental entities that represent the community is crucial.

Future Plans:

- Es Mi Parque will continue and expand. Es Mi Parque is a major part of the Multicultural Outreach Coordinator's responsibilities, and as such is now a permanent aspect of Department outreach efforts

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